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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0673
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 001125

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY CRITICIZES BURMA'S INACTION ON
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

REF: A. MANILA 1105

[1](#)B. MANILA 690

[1](#)C. MANILA 654

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a conversation with the Ambassador May 9, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo lamented the Burmese regime's truculent stance against international involvement in relief efforts, and outlined how the junta's resistance to cooperation is affecting Philippine efforts to assist victims of Cyclone Nargis. The Philippine Secretary of Health stands ready with a team of seasoned medical specialists who offer expertise in a broad range of disaster-relief services. Burma's ongoing crisis maintains resonance with Philippine national media; reports highlight the expanding scope of the calamity and the Burmese regime's seeming indifference toward rescuing its citizens. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Foreign Secretary Romulo informed the Ambassador May 9 that a 15-member Philippine medical contingent was suffering the same fate as other international relief workers, and could not yet enter Burma, pending approval of its visas (reftel A). Romulo opined that the regime's bureaucratic stall tactics likely reflected the ruling junta's fear that international involvement in relief efforts would present a sharp, negative contrast between its own brutal repression and international norms of behavior.

[1](#)3. (C) Romulo also believes that the Burmese junta's strident opposition to outside help stemmed in part from its upcoming constitutional referendum, long scheduled for May [1](#)10. In the wake of globally disseminated reports that the constitution was drafted in secret without opposition involvement or debate, international aid workers would serve as eyewitnesses that the entire process is a sham, with illegitimate results. Romulo nevertheless expressed his belief that a disaster of such unprecedented magnitude would ultimately force the Burmese generals to open up the nation as never before.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Health Secretary Francisco Duque III publicly reported that his veteran disaster-relief medical team stands ready to move into Burma at a moment's notice; its past deployments include 2004 assistance to victims of the devastating Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. In addition to surgical and internal-medicine services, the team includes psychologists, environmental scientists, epidemiologists, and health education instructors.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Burma continues to command front-page attention in Philippine national media. Leading dailies ran firsthand accounts of the tragedy, and underscored revised estimates that as many as 100,000 people may have lost their lives. Reports underscored the regime's callous disregard for suffering even as massive amounts of international aid faced logjams of red tape.

